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ELECTRO-THERMAL MICROMECHANICAL ACTUATOR FOR FINITELY POSITIONING A STORAGE DEVICE SLIDER AND METHODS OF USE AND MANUFACTURE

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1 **ELECTRO-THERMAL MICROMECHANICAL ACTUATOR FOR**
2 **FINITELY POSITIONING A STORAGE DEVICE SLIDER AND**
3 **METHODS OF USE AND MANUFACTURE**

4 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

5 **1. The Field of the Invention**

6 The invention relates to digital storage devices having a rotating media and
7 more specifically to systems and methods for finitely positioning a read/write slider in such
8 a storage device.

9 **2. The Relevant Art**

10 Computer systems generally utilize auxiliary storage devices onto which data can be
11 written and from which data can be read for later use. A direct access storage device
12 (DASD) is a common auxiliary storage device in which data is stored in known locations and
13 accessed by reference to those locations. A hard disk drive is a type of DASD that
14 incorporates rotating magnetic disks for storing data in magnetic form on concentric, radially
15 spaced tracks on the disk surfaces. Transducer heads driven in a path generally
16 perpendicular to the drive axis are used to write data to and read data from addressed
17 locations on the disks. These transducer heads are often referred to as sliders.

18 Current hard disk drives also typically utilize an actuator connected to the slider by
19 a support arm assembly. The actuator moves the slider to the desired track and maintains it
20 over the track centerline during read or write operations. The movement of the slider to a
21 desired track is referred to as data seeking or merely "seeking." Maintaining the slider over
22 the centerline of the desired track during read or write operation is referred to as track
23 following or "tracking."

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desired track is referred to as data seeking or merely "seeking." Maintaining the slider over

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2 following or "tracking."

3 The voice coil motor (VCM) typically comprises a coil movable throughout the
4 magnetic field of a permanent magnetic stator. The application of current to the VCM causes
5 the coil, and thus the attached head, to move in a radial fashion. In the absence of bias
6 forces, the acceleration of the coil is proportional to the applied current. A power amplifier
7 in response to a control input supplies this current.

8 In modern hard disk drive systems, the density of data tracks on the magnetic disks
9 is increasing at a dramatic rate. Prior art control systems of the described type are
10 experiencing difficulty in adequately positioning the slider exactly over the centerline of the
11 track for read and write operation in such high density hard disk drives. As the track pitch
12 of hard disk drives becomes smaller, prior art VCM systems are becoming inadequate at
13 positioning the slider with sufficient speed and accuracy to ensure that the read/write
14 transducer remains positioned over the centerline of the desired track during read and write
15 processes.

16 Accordingly, it should be apparent that a need exists for an improved positioning
17 device capable of finely positioning the slider of a hard disk drive such that a read/write
18 transducer can be quickly and accurately positioned over the centerline of a DASD track in
19 response to control signals from the DASD and positioning signals from the disk surface of
20 the hard disk drive.

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These and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following description and appended claims, or may be learned by the practice of the invention as set forth hereinafter.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is illustrated by way of example, and not by way of limitation, in the figures of the accompanying drawings and in which like reference numerals refer to similar elements and in which:

Figure 1 is a partially schematic view showing components of a direct access storage device (DASD) suitable for incorporating the positioning system of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a top view of the DASD of Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating data and control signals arranged on a disk surface of the DASD of Figure 1.

Figure 4 is a top perspective view illustrating a prior art read/write slider.

Figure 5 is a top perspective view illustrating one embodiment of a read/write slider of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a schematic flow chart diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process for the manufacture of an improved read/write slider of the present invention.

Figure 7 is a side view illustrating layers formed on a silicon wafer and used in the formation of a body of a read/write slider of the present invention.

Figure 8 is a side view illustrating masking of the layers of Figure 7 used in a process of forming a body of a read/write slider of the present invention.

Figure 9 is a side view illustrating the results of a RIE etching process conducted on the layers of Figure 8.

Figure 9a is a top view illustrating a wafer with a plurality of read/write heads of the present invention formed thereon.

Figure 10 is a perspective view of a body of a of a read/write slider formed by the RIE etching step 306 of Figure 6.

Figure 10a is a perspective view of a body of a of the read/write slider of Figure 10 subsequent to the hole etching step 312 of Figure 6.

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Figure 11 is a schematic flow chart diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for exactly positioning a read/write transducer head using the read/write slider of the present invention.

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1 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS**

2 Figure 1 shows a partial schematic block diagram illustrating the basic components
3 of digital storage device. Shown in the depicted embodiment is a direct access storage
4 device (DASD) in the form of a magnetic hard disk drive unit 10. Of course, the present
5 invention may also be employed within any other suitable type of digital storage device. The
6 disk drive unit 10 is shown including a data storage medium generally designated at 12 and
7 a control unit generally designated at 14. The disk drive unit 10 is shown illustrated in a
8 simplified form sufficient for an understanding of the present invention, and as one example
9 of the various types of storage devices that might employ the system and methods of the
10 present invention.

11 The illustrated disk drive unit 10 includes a stack 16 of disks 18 each having at least
12 one magnetic storage surface 20. The disks 18 are mounted in parallel for simultaneous
13 rotation on and by an integrated spindle and motor assembly 26. Data stored on the surface
14 20 of each disk 18 is read from and/or written to by a corresponding transducer head 28
15 movable across the disk surface 20.

16 The transducer heads 28 are mounted on flexure springs 30 carried by arms 32
17 collectively mounted for simultaneous pivotal movement about a support spindle 34. One
18 of the arms 32 includes an extension 36 driven in a pivotal motion by a head drive motor 38.

19 Although several drive arrangements are commonly used, the motor 38 in one embodiment
20 comprises a voice coil motor 40 cooperating with a magnet and core assembly (not shown).

21 The motor 40 is operatively controlled by the control unit 14 to move the transducer heads
22 28 in synchronism in a radial direction in order to position the transducer heads 28 in
23 registration with data tracks 42 (of Figure 2) to be followed and to access separately
24 addresses data sectors 44 of the data tracks 42.

25 The disk drive unit 10 is shown as a modular unit enclosed within a housing 46. The
26 various components of the disk drive unit 10 are controlled by signals generated by the
27

1 control unit 14. These signals preferably include motor control signals on a line 26A and
2 position control signals on a line 38A.

3 Referring to Figure 2, a number of data tracks 42 are arrayed, each at a specific radial
4 location, in a concentric pattern in the magnetic medium of each disk surface 20. A data
5 cylinder includes a set of corresponding data tracks 42 for each data surface 20 in the data
6 storage disk unit 10. The data tracks 42 include a plurality of addressed segments or data
7 sectors 44, each containing a predefined amount of data storage locations for storing data
8 records for later retrieval.

9 The sectors 44 are disposed at predetermined positions relative to a servo reference
10 index. In Figure 2, one sector 43 comprises SECTOR 0 with a fixed index or mark
11 identifying it as the first data sector. The location of each successive sector 44 is identified
12 by a sector identification signal (SID) 48 read by the transducer heads 28 from the surfaces
13 20. One or more sectors 44 are preferably reserved as a reserved area 50 for storing data
14 particular to a disk 18 or head 28.

15 Figure 3 shows one arrangement of a sector 44 of a data track 42. As shown in
16 Figure 3, the sector 44 includes servo information 52, gaps 54, 64, an index or ID portion 56,
17 sync information 58, a data storage area 60, and error correction codes (ECC) 62. The sectors
18 are repeated a fixed number of times within each track 42. In one embodiment, for example,
19 96 such sectors are formed in each track 42. The servo information, generally known as
20 servo identification marks (SIDs) are read by the transducer heads 28 and used by the control
21 unit to generate a position error signal (PES) indicative of the location of a transducer head
22 28 with relation to a center point of the track 44. The PES is then used as feedback in
23 driving the servo actuator 38 to position the transducer heads 28. Figure 4 is a perspective
24 view illustrating a read/write slider 100 of the prior art. The read/write slider 100 is shown
25 positioned over a magnetic disk 114 (shown schematically). The slider 100 has an air-
26 bearing surface (ABS) 106, the surface facing the magnetic disk 114 during operation.
27 Opposite the ABS 106 is a top surface 102. A front face 104 of the

1 slider 100 is perpendicular to the ABS and has formed therein a read/write transducer 108.

2 The transducer 108 is configured to read and write data onto the magnetic disk 114. A
3 plurality of sets of electrical contact pads 110 and 112 are set in the face 104 of the slider.

4 The contact pads 110, 112 are configured to connect electrical leads (not shown) containing
5 read and write signals from the control unit 14 to the read/write transducer 108.

6 Figure 5 is a perspective view illustrating one embodiment of a read/write slider 200
7 of the present invention. The slider 200 is preferably formed with a body 201 made of a
8 material that may be deep reactive ion etched. In one embodiment, the body 201 of the slider
9 200 is substantially formed from silicon.

10 The slider 200 as depicted comprises an etched region 216. Within the etched region
11 216 is formed a movable member 219. In the depicted embodiment, the movable member
12 219 is a tongue-like structure attached only at a neck 221 to the body 201 of the slider 200.

13 The movable member 219 is in one embodiment defined by a curved trench 215
14 extending between the movable member 219 and the body 201 of the slider 200. Preferably,
15 the trench 215 extends from the face 104 of the slider body 201 through the slider body 201,
16 terminating just prior to reaching a rear face. The trench 215 also preferably extends laterally
17 on a curved plane between the movable member 219 and the slider body 201, beginning on
18 a first side 215a and terminating on a second side 215b.

19 A hole 218 preferably extends into the face 102 with a depth at least equal to the
20 depth of the trench 215. The hole 218 preferably intersects the termination point of the
21 trench 215, to one side of the trench 215, leaving the movable member 219 connected to the
22 body 201 only by the narrow neck 221. The neck 221 is preferably somewhat flexible.
23 Accordingly, the movable member 219 is substantially free-standing and capable of being
24 deflected in small increments with respect to the body 201 of the slider 200.

25 In the depicted embodiment, a heater element 223 is located within the etched region 216
26 atop the movable member 219. The heater element 223 is preferably configured with a
27 narrow lead 224 and a connected wide lead 226 that is substantially parallel and

1 coextensive with the narrow lead 224. Each of the leads 224, 226 terminate in an
2 electrical contact pad 220.

3 The electrical contact pads 220 are preferably configured to be connected to a set of
4 electrical leads (not shown) connected with the control unit of the DASD to provide current
5 to the heater element 223 and are connected to the heater element 223 by metal leads 222.

6 The heater element 223, metal leads 222, and contact pads 220 are preferably formed of a
7 high melting point conductive material. The high melting point conductive material may be
8 selected from metals such as titanium, tantalum, and tungsten that are easily sputtered onto
9 a silicon surface using known methods. Polysilicon may also be used.

10 When a current is supplied across the heater element 223, the narrow lead 224, which
11 is narrower than the wide lead 226, experiences greater resistance and increases more rapidly
12 in temperature than the wide lead 226. The uneven heating of the narrow lead 224 and the
13 wide lead 226 causes the movable member 219 to distort, expanding and contracting faster
14 on the narrow lead side as a varying current is passed through the leads 224, 226. This
15 causes the movable member 219 to selectively move back and forth within the trench 215
16 with respect to the body 201.

17 The selective movement of the movable member 219 is harnessed by affixing the top
18 of the movable member 219 to the end of the arm 32 of Figure 2. The slider 200 is thus
19 connected to the arm 32 through the movable member 219. Due to the conservation of
20 momentum, movement with respect to the slider body 201 of the movable member 219,
21 which is affixed to the arm 32, causes the slider body 201 to move with respect to the arm
22 32.

23 That is, since the movable member 219 is affixed to the arm 32 of Figure 2, it cannot
24 move relative to the arm 32 as it distorts. However, the slider body 201, which is affixed to
25 the arm 32 of Figure 1 only by virtue of its connection to the movable member 219, is able
26 to move. Accordingly, the slider body 200 moves in a direction and with a distance
27 corresponding to the amount of distortion created in the movable member 219. By

1 controlling the amount of current passing through the heater element 223, the amount of
2 distortion and thus movement of the slider body with respect to the movable member 219 can
3 be controlled, allowing an exact placement of the slider body 200. The read/write transducer
4 108 can thus be exactly positioned with respect to an underlying track on the magnetic disk
5 114.

6 Figure 6 is a schematic flow chart diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process
7 300 for the manufacture of an improved read/write slider of the present invention. The
8 process 300 will be discussed in one embodiment with reference to the positioning system
9 of Figure 5. The process 300 begins, and in a step 302, a read/write slider body 350 is
10 formed on a wafer of silicon. Specific manners of formation of the read/write slider body
11 350 are well known in the art and will not be discussed here in greater detail.

12 Under the present invention, many slider bodies 350 may be formed on a single
13 silicon wafer during a fabrication process. Figure 9a shows by way of example a plurality
14 of slider bodies 350 formed on a single wafer 404. While only a few slider bodies 350 are
15 shown, in practice, slider bodies 350 are typically so small that thousands may be formed on
16 a single silicon wafer 404.

17 Figure 7 depicts schematically one embodiment of a slider body 350 formed with a
18 silicon substrate 354 having patterned read/write head layers formed therein. The read/write
19 layers are not shown, but are commonly known in the art as the patterned layers used to form
20 a magnetoresistive sensor. Disposed over the read/write layers is a protective layer 352. The
21 protective layer 352 is preferably formed of an electrical insulator such as silicon oxide or
22 silicon nitride. Figure 7 is a side view of a cross-section of a portion of a silicon wafer such
23 as the wafer 404 of Figure 9a. The portion of the wafer shown in Figure 7 represents a single
24 slider body 350 which will eventually be separated from the wafer. Consequently, while
25 lateral edges of the slider body 350 are shown, those edges are not generally formed until a
26 slider separation step 308 to be discussed below.

1 Once the read/write slider 200 is formed, the etched region 216 is lithographically
2 defined on the body of the slider 200 at a step 304. This step is illustrated in Figure 8.
3 Shown therein is the slider body 350 held on a wafer holder 356, which also acts as a reactive
4 ion etching (RIE) etch stop. Above the patterned read/write head layer 352 is formed a
5 photoresist mask 358. For illustration purposes, the photoresist mask 358 is shown with two
6 patterned openings, a thin opening 340 and a thick opening 342.

7 As is well known in the art of semiconductor processing, reactive ion etching has a
8 maximum aspect ratio, and exceeding that aspect ratio results in only a partial etch.
9 Accordingly, thinner openings such as the thin opening 340 are used to etch only partially
10 through the read/write slider body 350, while thicker openings such as the opening 342 are
11 used to etch entirely through the slider body 350 down to the wafer holder 356. The shape
12 and placement of the photoresist defining the etched region 216 can be understood in one
13 embodiment by reference to Figure 10a. In order to etch the trench 215 into the forward face
14 104 of the slider body 201, the portion of the trench 215 between points 504 and 508 is left
15 exposed as the thin opening 340, while covering the remainder of the surface 104 with the
16 photoresist mask 358. The aspect ratio of the trench 340 is selected to be sufficiently narrow
17 that the etching process (shown etching downward 410 in Figure 9a) stops prior to reaching
18 the trailing edge 105 of the slider body 201.

19 At the same time, the edges of the slider body 201 may be defined by a thicker
20 opening 342 in order to separate the slider body 201 from the wafer. Thus, the thicker
21 opening 342 is patterned around the periphery of the slider body 201, as shown by the heavy
22 lines 406 of Figure 9a. The reactive ion etching process is then conducted in step 306.

23 The region lithographically defined in the step 304 is then reactive ion etched into
24 the slider body 200 in a step 306. The etching process is preferably conducted in a direction
25 (indicated at 410 in Figure 9a) down into the slider body 201 through the surface 104. The
26 edges 406 of the slider body 350 are fully etched, as shown for the trench 346 of Figure 9,
27 separating the slider body 350 from surrounding slider bodies.

1 The etching of the trench 344 does not fully penetrate the slider body 350, however.
2 Instead, the etch terminates within the silicon substrate 354, as shown. The partial etch 344
3 results in a trench such as the trench 215 of Figure 5. Etching of the trench 215 in turn
4 defines the movable member 219. The movable member 219 is formed in this manner to be
5 freestanding with respect to the rest of the slider body 200, as depicted schematically by the
6 freestanding portion 345 of Figure 9.

7 Referring to Figure 10, it should be understood that the locations of the trenches 344,
8 346 of Figure 9 are shown by way of example only. If, for example, the trench 346 is
9 considered to be the portion of the periphery 406 defining the top edge 102 of the slider body
10 201, then it should be seen that the distance between the two trenches 344, 346 will vary.

11 That is, the trench 344 will have a depth corresponding to the distance between the points
12 502 and 504 and the points 510 and 508, and will be separated from the trench 346 by a
13 distance varying between the points 504 and 508, being the widest at the point 506 and
14 intersecting at the points 504 and 508.

15 In a further step, 308, the photolithography mask 358 is removed from the wafer, and
16 the slider body 350 is separated from other slider bodies 350 of the wafer on which it was
17 formed. The resultant slider body is shown in Figure 10. After the slider body 350 has been
18 separated from the silicon wafer, suitable tracking guides may be formed in the air bearing
19 surface 106, after which, in a step 308, the slider 200 is turned over and the hole 218 is
20 lithographically defined in the surface 102 opposite the ABS in a step 310. In a step 312, the
21 hole 218 is then etched into the slider body through the surface 102, perpendicular to the
22 direction of the etch of the trench 215, as discussed above. The creation of the hole 218 in
23 the surface of the slider 200 creates the narrow neck 221, leaving the movable member 219
24 attached to the body 201 of the slider 200 only at the neck 221.

25 An electro-thermal element 223 is then formed upon the movable member 219 in a step 314.

26 The electro-thermal element 223 is then formed upon the movable member 219. The
27 formation of the electro-thermal element 223 upon the movable member 219 is

1 preferably accomplished by sputtering a high melting point metal on the slider body
2 with the pattern shown in Figure 5. Such sputtering processes are well known in the art and
3 need not be discussed here in greater detail.

4 The contact pads 220 are formed on the slider body 201 and are joined to the electro-
5 thermal element 223 by the metal leads 222 in a step 318. The leads 222 and pads 220 may
6 be formed in the same sputtering process as the electro-thermal element 223. The slider 200
7 is then connected to an arm 32 of a disk drive assembly or other storage device in a step 320.

8 The arm 32 is preferably affixed to the slider body 350 such that the connection point
9 between the arm and the slider body 350 occurs on the movable member 219 as discussed
10 above. In one embodiment, the arm 32 is bonded to the movable member at a point distal
11 to the neck 221.

12 While the process 300 of Figure 6 has been described in a given order, it will be
13 readily apparent to one of skill in the art that the order in which the steps of Figure 6 are
14 conducted may vary. For instance, in one alternative embodiment, steps 314 and 316 are
15 conducted subsequent to step 308 and prior to step 310.

16 Figure 11 is a schematic flow chart diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process
17 400 for using a micromechanical actuator of the present invention. In one embodiment, the
18 micromechanical actuator is configured in the manner discussed above with regard to Figure
19 5. In the process 400, at a step 401, the slider 200 is initially positioned over a selected track
20 44 in a standard manner, typically employing the use the voice coil motor 40, guided by the
21 control unit 14, in response to servo identification marks (SID marks) on the disk and a
22 position error signal (PES). The position of the slider 200 with respect to a centerline of the
23 selected track 44 is then obtained, preferably, with a PES.

24 In a step 404, the position data obtained from the voice coil motor 40 is evaluated to
25 determine if the slider 200 is positioned over the centerline of the track. If the slider 200 is
26 positioned over the centerline of the track, or within a sufficient distance from it, the process
27 400 enters a stable state in a step 403. The method remains in the stable state until the slider

1 has moved again, at which point the new position of the slider is obtained and the
2 process 400 starts over.

3 If however, the slider 200 is not centered on the track, exceeding a selected threshold
4 PES, for example, the process 400 then proceeds to a step 406. The micropositioning
5 process of the present invention may thus be incurred when the PES is erratic due to
6 nonrepeatable runout, vibration, or the like. Step 404 may also be omitted in certain
7 embodiments, such that micropositioning is not selective, but is used after each instance of
8 seeking a new track 44.

9 At the step 406, the distance the slider 200 needs to move to be centered on the track
10 in a step 406 is determined. Thereafter, the amount of current that is needed to move the
11 slider 200 the necessary distance is determined in a step 408. Preferably, the control unit 14
12 of Figure 1 performs the steps of determining the position of the slider and the amount of
13 current needed to position the slider accurately using feed back from the servo marks 52 on
14 the disk surface. The current may be calculated from equations or may be acquired from a
15 look-up table.

16 The current supplied to the heater element 223 is then adjusted in a step 410. The
17 voice coil motor driving circuitry is used in one embodiment to provide the current to the
18 heater element 223. The current supplied to the heater element in the step 410 heats the
19 narrow segment 224 faster than the wide segment 226, causing a distortion in the movable
20 member 219. Since the movable member 219 is affixed to the arm 32 of Figure 2, it does
21 not substantially move relative to the arm 32 as it distorts. However, as discussed, the rest
22 of the slider body 200, which is not affixed to the arm 32 of Figure 1, is free to move. The
23 slider body 200 thus moves a direction and distance corresponding and opposite to the
24 amount of movement created by the distortion of the movable member 219. This process
25 of moving the slider body 200 in relation to the distortion of the movable member 219 allows
26 an exact placement of the slider body 200.

1 In one embodiment, a bias current is continually supplied to the heater element 223, holding
2 the slider body 201 in an intermediate position. Reducing the amount of current swings the
3 slider body 201 in one direction with respect to the arm 32, and increasing the amount of
4 current supplied swings the slider body 201 in the opposite direction.

5 The process of steps 402 through 410 may be repeated during tracking on a single
6 track 44, repeatedly generating a new PES and making adjustments using the steps 404
7 through 410 as necessary. This manner of tracking continues until a new read or write
8 operation is requested to be performed as indicated in a step 412. This is indicated by steps
9 413 and 414, which check for the end of the operation and if it has ended, return the slider
10 to a rest position, and if the operation has not ended, progressing to a step 403 to wait for a
11 new PES signal.

12 When a new read or write operation is requested, the process 400 returns to the step 401
13 and begins again at the new slider position. However, if another read or write operation is
14 not waiting to be performed, the slider 200 is returned to a rest position in a step 414 and the
15 process 400 returns to the step 403 where it waits for a new position error signal or a new
16 read or write operation to be initiated.

17 What is claimed is:
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